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Chairman: Mr. de Rojas ..... (Venezuela)
later: Mr. Glanzer (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Austria)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 98: Environment and sustainable development (*continued*) (A/52/25, A/52/112, A/52/217-S/1997/507, A/52/284, A/52/318, A/52/347, A/52/447-S/1997/775, A/52/460, A/52/514-S/1997/815)

(a) Implementation of decisions and recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (*continued*) (A/52/3, A/52/413)

(g) Special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 (*continued*) (A/52/280, A/52/413)

1. **Mr. Azaiez** (Tunisia) said that, while progress had been made in the area of sustainable development at both the national and international levels, *inter alia*, through the entry into force of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, the objectives set at the Rio Conference were far from being achieved: the environment continued to deteriorate, poverty was still a major problem and the overall situation, in terms of consumption and production patterns and emissions of pollutants and toxic substances, still did not meet the requirements of sustainable development. The report of the Secretary-General (A/52/280) recommended that all organizations and programmes of the United Nations system should strengthen their support for national efforts to implement Agenda 21 and should enhance the coordination of their activities at the field level, in full consultation with national Governments. Moreover, the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development had decided to focus on improving linkages between policy agreements reached at the international level and national sustainable development activities. In that connection, Tunisia hoped that the consolidation of the three Secretariat departments in the economic and social fields into a single department and the new functions of the Division for Sustainable Development would enhance the Organization's capacity to support regional and national action to implement Agenda 21.

2. Tunisia's sustainable development efforts included measures to combat desertification, to conserve water resources and to harness energy. It had launched three major programmes aimed, respectively, at combating desertification, protecting the sea and the coast and protecting nature and biological diversity. However, the complexity of environment and sustainable development problems was such that Tunisia's efforts, which had yielded tangible results, were nonetheless insufficient. Without the united efforts of all countries, no developing country could hope to overcome those problems.

3. With respect to measures to combat desertification, Tunisia was concerned to note that interest in the relevant Convention fell short of expectations, and hoped that the international community would increase its contributions to the Trust Fund and the Special Voluntary Fund. Developing countries that undertook large-scale activities in the area of sustainable development should receive support from international financial institutions and rich countries. That support should take the form of not only financial support, but also technology transfers.

4. **Mr. Hasmy** (Malaysia), speaking on behalf of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that some progress had been made since the Rio Conference, but that overall trends with respect to sustainable development had worsened. The commitments concerning the provision of additional financial resources, the transfer of environmentally sound technologies and support for national capacity-building had not been honoured. Consequently, ASEAN urged the international community to fulfil its commitments immediately and without condition.

5. The debate on environment and sustainable development was taking place at a time when forest fires had spread a haze of smoke over much of South-East Asia. That phenomenon underscored, once again, the problem of transboundary pollution.

6. ASEAN firmly believed that economic development could be compatible with environmental protection. The ministers of the environment of the ASEAN member States met regularly to discuss the issue. In September 1997, they had adopted the Jakarta Declaration on Environment and Development. Moreover, ASEAN had launched several projects in the area of environmental cooperation.

7. ASEAN awaited with interest the outcome of the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Kyoto in December 1997. The establishment of binding targets would result in significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions; the international community must act immediately if it was to avert an ecological catastrophe.

8. **Mr. A'Ala** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly had provided an opportunity to assess the progress made since

the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the fulfilment of the commitments which the participants had made on that occasion, and to give a new impetus to the implementation of Agenda 21. Although the outcome of that session had not met the expectations of all Member States, the resolutions and recommendations adopted would encourage countries to pursue their efforts. Progress would depend on the fulfilment of the commitments made in Rio, in terms of both the mobilization of the financial resources needed to assist developing countries and the transfer to those countries of clean technologies on preferential terms.

9. Since the Rio Conference, the Syrian Arab Republic had taken the environment into account in its development plans and had striven to optimize the use of its resources so as to achieve sustainable development. In that spirit, it had ratified the three conventions concerning biological diversity, climate change and desertification, and had taken steps to protect the ozone layer, rationalize the use of its water resources and preserve its forests. In cooperation with the Global Environment Facility, it had launched a capacity-building project in the area of energy.

10. The principles set forth in the Rio Declaration must be applied in order to give effect to the action taken at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Principle 25, which stated that peace, development and environmental protection were interdependent, could not be applied in the Middle East because Israel stubbornly continued to occupy Arab territories. It was likewise impossible to apply principle 23, which concerned the need to protect the environment and natural resources of people under occupation. In that connection, the General Assembly, in its resolution 51/190, had reaffirmed the inalienable right of the Palestinian people and the population of the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources.

11. The right to development, which was considered a fundamental right by the international community, could not be exercised under foreign occupation, when the most basic rights, such as the right to life and the right to self-determination, were not respected. A healthy environment and sustainable development could not be achieved without peace, security and stability.

12. **Mr. Estévez** (Guatemala), speaking on behalf of the Central American countries, said he regretted that most developed countries had not taken advantage of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly to reaffirm their commitment to sustainable development. No specific commitments had been made with respect to the financing of sustainable development, the transfer of technology or national capacity-building. Only Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden devoted 0.7 per cent of their gross national product (GNP) to official development assistance, as requested by the Organization. The Central American countries regretted that the Statement of Commitment adopted at the special session did not have the force of a political declaration; however, they recognized that it had reiterated the international community's intention to implement Agenda 21. They also acknowledged that the special session had served to strengthen the role of the Commission on Sustainable Development in the implementation of Agenda 21 and to emphasize its importance as a forum for dialogue on other related issues.

13. Sustainable development was a central theme in the priorities of the Central American countries. In 1994, they had established the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America and the issue was regularly included in the agenda of the twice-yearly summit meetings of heads of State. They had forged a common policy on environmental issues and drafted subregional conventions on various topics, including forests, biodiversity and toxic wastes.

14. Agenda 21 transcended protection of the environment and offered an integrated and balanced approach to political, economic, social and environmental issues. The Central American countries had established regional integration mechanisms to deal with legal, economic and social issues as well as with environmental issues. They were also trying to get all sectors of society to participate actively in efforts to promote sustainable development, and had taken steps to combat poverty.

15. The Central American countries emphasized the importance of the Global Environment Facility and believed that it should be strengthened and provided with additional resources so that it could carry out its task. The Capacity 21 programme should also be strengthened. They reaffirmed their attachment to the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, and hoped that further efforts would be made to promote sustainable development.

16. **Mr. Kebede** (Ethiopia) said that considerable progress had been made since the Rio Conference. The international community had set about facilitating international cooperation on the environment and had established the necessary programmes of action to implement the cardinal principles of Agenda 21. However, Ethiopia believed that the Rio objectives could not be achieved without effective international cooperation and the active participation of all stakeholders at the national, regional and subregional levels.

17. The nineteenth special session of the General Assembly had not delivered the expected results. Consequently, there was an imperative need to strengthen the global and regional mechanisms that were necessary to achieve sustainable development, and to strengthen international cooperation in order to do so. The United Nations bodies, international and intergovernmental organizations, regional and subregional institutions, and the developed countries should first and foremost help the least developed countries implement the programme of action adopted at Rio. The international community should give priority to issues of direct relevance to eliminating poverty and ensuring food security. Accordingly, Ethiopia endorsed the proposal to make access to freshwater one of the priorities for environmental action and suggested that the Commission on Sustainable Development should address the issue comprehensively at its sixth session.

18. The issue of drought and desertification was becoming critical in Ethiopia; indeed, 73 per cent of the country was affected. The El Niño phenomenon was affecting agricultural areas. The forests that had once covered 40 per cent of the country now covered a mere 2.7 per cent. His Government therefore urged the international community to provide the necessary financial, technical and material resources to reverse the trend and enable Ethiopia to make ecologically rational use of its rivers and other natural resources in order to make socio-economic progress.

19. His Government called on all States to ratify the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa before the second session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, which was to be held in Dakar in 1998. The global mechanism, which was to be established pursuant to a decision taken at the first session of the Conference of the Parties, would facilitate the implementation of the Convention through national and subregional action programmes; it must therefore be given all the support it needed to operate.

20. The African countries urgently needed assistance to formulate national programmes to combat desertification. International work programmes concerning the environment and development must cover the issues of drought and desertification. Regional and subregional cooperation must be intensified. Therefore, subregional organizations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development must be strengthened and assisted.

21. For its part, Ethiopia had made environmental and sustainable development issues an absolute priority and had already achieved results. It had launched a national environmental protection strategy and was currently formulating action plans for forestry, agriculture and environmental rehabilitation. It had also taken the initiative of drafting a biosafety protocol on behalf of the African countries.

22. **Mr. Lacanlale** (United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)) said that UNIDO was contributing to the implementation of Agenda 21 by promoting sustainable industrial development, which consisted of promoting economic growth, protecting the environment and creating jobs. Sustainable industrial development was based on complementarity between industrial development and environmental sustainability and could be achieved with appropriate frameworks for action and appropriate technology and market incentives. He illustrated his point with various examples of UNIDO initiatives in the field in India, Brazil, Romania and Zimbabwe.

23. In the context of the implementation of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, UNIDO had helped industries in developing countries eliminate production and consumption of ozone-depleting substances in products such as aerosols, foams and solvents. By the end of 1996, UNIDO had completed or was on the point of completing 190 projects valued at $92.5 million, and in 1997 it expected to implement projects worth a further $21 million.

24. **Mr. Canchola** (Mexico) said that the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly had provided an opportunity to see how far the commitments made at the Rio Conference had been honoured. While a better outcome would have been desirable, the special session had nonetheless allowed for consideration of one of the biggest successes of the Rio Conference, namely, the inclusion of sustainable development amongst the international community's greatest concerns. In fact, by tackling the usual problems from that new angle, the international community had managed to launch or relaunch a number of multilateral negotiating processes coupled with international instruments which, it hoped, would enable it to meet the challenges of the next century.

25. The concept of sustainable development provided an overall framework while the various development strategies reflected delicate balances which States worked out by including or excluding particular aspects. That was the procedure which had been followed at the various major world conferences, in the Commission on Sustainable Development and during the recent special session of the

General Assembly; it explained why talks had tended to get bogged down on the issue of whether to stick to the commitments already entered into or whether it would be better to change them.

26. One of the problems that had come up in that context was the difficulty of putting into practice a concept of sustainable development when different governmental bodies did not always have a clear understanding of it, which point had been stressed in the conclusions of the Inter-Parliamentary Council at its 160th session (A/S-19/15/Add.1) and those of the International Parliamentary Union at its 97th Conference (A/52/139). If delegations wished to avoid the revision of objectives and the dilution of efforts, it was essential that concepts be redefined and that commitments be reaffirmed.

27. One issue that had hardly been discussed at all during the special session was the relationship between the General Assembly and conferences of the parties to certain international conventions, particularly those deriving from the Rio Conference. Since the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and some of their bodies, such as the Commission on Sustainable Development, had held their debates parallel to those more specialized intergovernmental forums, it had created the impression in certain quarters that they were duplicating each other's work. On the contrary, Mexico believed that both processes had their *raison d'être*. First of all, the conventions on biological diversity, climate change and desertification control had been generated by United Nations bodies. Second, those three conventions, together with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, were absolutely fundamental references for any debate on the environment and, as such, could not be excluded from the programme of work of United Nations bodies. Third, through the United Nations, by virtue of its universality, those instruments could be considered from a global perspective; their implementation could be evaluated in greater depth; and their possible interactions with other sectoral and intersectoral themes could be examined. Lastly, the debates held by intergovernmental forums and the Assembly were different in nature. The participants in a conference of parties made essentially technical and legal commitments. The broader debate in the General Assembly was conducive to overall appraisals, the formulation of general policy guidelines, the harmonization of efforts and decision-making on questions of an international scope which had a strong impact on international relations.

28. **Mr. Talbot** (Guyana) said that the conclusion to be drawn from the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly was that, in the field of environment and development, the international community's rhetoric had yet to be matched by its resolve. Thus, the progress achieved had remained modest. The Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 had made virtually no progress with regard to finance and technology transfer, which were, however, central to the implementation of Agenda 21. A considerable gap therefore remained between the means of implementation and the requirements to be satisfied, which cast doubt on the seriousness of the commitments undertaken by the international community with regard to sustainable development and jeopardized the partnership formed in Rio.

29. Thus, the special session of the General Assembly had brought out the fact that overall trends with respect to sustainable development were worse than they had been in 1992. Production and consumption patterns had barely changed and threats to the environment were ever greater. Clearly, developed countries bore responsibility for that failure, and it was therefore incumbent on them to show goodwill in Kyoto, where a decision would be taken on the Berlin Mandate under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In particular, developed countries must make a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions within specified time-frames. In that connection, his delegation supported the position reflected in the protocol of the Alliance of Small Island States.

30. With regard to the work programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development, his delegation welcomed the fact that issues relating to poverty and consumption and production patterns had been identified as overriding priorities, since poverty was one of the major obstacles to sustainable development.

31. Equally important was the review of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. During the special session of the General Assembly, the international community had reaffirmed its commitment to the implementation of the Programme of Action. While efforts had been made at the national and regional levels, they must be supplemented by financial and other external assistance, such as the transfer of environmentally sound technology, and the Barbados Programme of Action must be accorded the priority it deserved in the work of the Commission.

32. Lastly, Guyana welcomed the decision to establish an Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, as it attached the greatest importance to the Forest Principles agreed at Rio and the overall objective of the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests. That was borne out by the Iwokrama Programme, which it had launched in its

territory for the purposes of scientific studies and experimentation in sustainable management of tropical rain forests, taking into account economic, environmental and social considerations.

33. **Mr. Merouane** (Algeria) said that the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly had enabled the international community to take stock of how discouragingly little progress had been achieved in five years. The results, particularly with regard to the provision of additional financial resources and technology transfer, were disheartening and aroused serious and legitimate concern about the future of international cooperation in that regard.

34. The special session, however, had highlighted certain positive developments, in particular, the commendable national efforts of various countries, including those of the South, to implement Agenda 21, despite the countless difficulties and constraints to which they were subjected. The fact remained that those efforts would remain largely ineffectual as long as they were not supplemented by adequate and resolute international cooperation. In that connection, the General Assembly had repeatedly insisted that the United Nations programmes and organizations should strengthen their support to national efforts. His delegation also welcomed the work undertaken to that end by the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development of the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

35. Another vital aspect to consider was that environmental protection was acquiring not only greater importance, but also greater scope and complexity. Since the international institutional framework for environmental protection was characterized by a very strong trend towards fragmentation, the effective participation of all countries, including the developing countries, was limited and seriously hampered. In another sense, the work of the Second Committee was also impeded by the piecemeal information and documentation it received. In order for the General Assembly to fulfil its follow-up and guidance roles, the various intergovernmental bodies and processes must be given greater coherence.

36. In the current institutional framework, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) occupied a key place which should be consolidated. In that connection, his delegation welcomed the fact that the Secretary-General had stressed in his reform proposals that high priority must be given to according UNEP the status, strength and access to resources it required in order to function effectively as a world environmental agency. His delegation looked forward to learning about all the reform measures that would be recommended by both the Secretary-General and the High-Level Committee established by the Governing Council of UNEP. First and foremost, however, UNEP, which had already been revitalized following the adoption of the Nairobi Declaration of 7 February 1997 on its future role and mandate, needed financial support.

37. His delegation also welcomed the ambitious work programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which should attest to the revitalization of international cooperation at a time when, in order to rise to the huge challenges relating to environmental protection and the promotion of sustainable development that the coming century would pose, the international community must display a spirit of genuine partnership based on dialogue, solidarity and cooperation.

38. **Mr. M'Mella** (Kenya) said that, since the Rio Summit, the developing countries had made every effort, under difficult conditions, to fulfil their obligations under Agenda 21 by integrating environmental concerns into their national development policies. Kenya, in cooperation with UNEP, UNDP and the World Bank, had established a National Environment Action Plan, reviewed its environmental legislation with a view to enhancing its impact and introduced environmental studies in school curricula. It had also ratified many international conventions, including the three major offshoots of the Rio Conference on climate change, biological diversity and desertification control.

39. He recalled that the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was the body responsible for the implementation of most obligations under Agenda 21. The Governing Council of UNEP and the General Assembly had reaffirmed the need to strengthen the Programme and maintain its role as the principal United Nations body in the field of the environment. Therefore, UNEP should be provided with the resources that would allow it to fulfil its mandate. The Programme should also avoid spreading itself too thinly in the process of decentralizing its operations to regional offices. UNEP should hold its meetings at headquarters in order to make optimal use of its capacity and achieve savings. Furthermore, UNEP and Habitat should operate as distinct entities, in line with the General Assembly resolutions originally adopted on that matter.

40. His delegation was also concerned at the continuing difficulties faced by the United Nations Office in Nairobi, which still did not have the resources required to provide quality services while securing substantial savings. The Office, unlike the United Nations offices at Geneva and Vienna, was still not funded from the regular budget of the United Nations.

41. It was disheartening to note that, five years after Rio, the global environment had continued to deteriorate. His delegation was therefore seriously concerned that efforts to implement Agenda 21 were being hampered by the continued lack of adequate and predictable financial resources and that it was therefore very difficult to achieve sustainable development, especially in the developing countries. The establishment of the Global Environment Facility was one of the major achievements of the process set into motion by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development; it was therefore very disappointing that funding levels had been well below needs. Much also remained to be done in the areas of transfer of resources and technology, technical assistance and capacity-building.

42. In conclusion, he urged the international community, in particular, the richer nations, and all relevant international organizations, to honour their obligations with respect to the full implementation of Agenda 21.

43. **Mr. Ito** (Japan) said that 1997 had been the year of the environment, with the holding of the special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, and the convening of the international conference in Kyoto.

44. Much had been achieved since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development; achievements included the entry into force of conventions, the implementation of programmes and, especially, the holding of the first session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification. Unfortunately, all the efforts to promote sustainable development had not been successful, basically because of the wide divisions among Member States on some issues.

45. Thus, the special session of the General Assembly had ended on a disappointing note; that was mainly due to the fact that the media had focused attention on climate change, to the detriment of the many other issues that had been addressed, and no political declaration had emerged from the deliberations.

46. However, his delegation believed that the special session had greatly contributed to reinvigorating the international community's efforts just as those efforts were beginning to lose momentum. Japan had joined in that effort by proposing a comprehensive strategy for the prevention of global warming and initiatives for sustainable development towards the twenty-first century. He also welcomed the programme of work adopted for the Commission on Sustainable Development and the establishment of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests.

47. Since it was very important to promote the implementation of the programmes agreed upon at the special session of the General Assembly before the review of 2002, the Commission on Sustainable Development would play an increasingly significant role. In order to enable the Commission to provide a forum for promoting political momentum towards sustainable development and discussing long-term strategic objectives, the number of items on its agenda for each session should be limited so that discussions would be more focused. His delegation, for its part, would continue to participate actively in the Commission's work.

48. *Mr. Glanzer (Austria) took the Chair.*

49. **Mr. Chouinard** (Canada) said that, with the year 2000 fast approaching, sustainable development continued to be the most vital issue facing mankind; it required a concerted and long-term commitment from the international community.

50. In that respect, the special session of the General Assembly had been a difficult exercise which had not met all expectations. In addition to the enormity of the challenges, the session had demonstrated the extreme complexity of the international dialogue on sustainable development. At the same time, it was a necessary and productive exercise which had forcefully brought home to each country the need to redouble its efforts in order to better translate the commitments of Rio into reality.

51. One important result of the special session was the establishment of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, with an excellent work programme, including consideration of a possible draft international convention on forests, to which Canada attached very high priority.

52. He was also pleased with the adoption of the work programme for the Commission on Sustainable Development, which would place emphasis on a number of themes crucial to the future of mankind, such as freshwater resources, oceans, energy and transport, in the broader context of poverty eradication and developments in patterns of consumption and production.

53. He supported the ratification and rapid implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities and intended to ratify the agreement for the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks. As far as climate change was concerned, and in the context of the Kyoto Conference, Canada favoured objectives and timetables that were legally binding but also realistic and flexible, as part of a concerted global approach.

54. Turning to the results of the first session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification, he welcomed the decisions taken, especially with respect to the Global Mechanism and the choice of Bonn as the site of the new permanent secretariat, and said that Canada was prepared to make a considerable contribution to both multilateral and bilateral programmes on desertification. He was also pleased with the positive developments in the negotiations aimed at producing a biosafety protocol.

55. In the area of pollution, and within the framework of the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, Canada continued to play a very active role in the preparation of a protocol on persistent organic pollutants, and in the negotiations on the international convention on persistent organic pollutants. It had also hosted the second meeting of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety, as part of the preparatory activities. Canada urged all participating countries to finalize the text of the prior informed consent convention.

56. His country, which had a long history of friendly relations with small island developing States, had welcomed the various measures taken by the United Nations system, especially by the United Nations Development Programme, to follow-up the Barbados Programme of Action.

57. Finally, he noted the renewed commitment to the principles of the Montreal Protocol demonstrated by the agreement on the earlier phase-out of methyl bromide in all countries of the world. The lessons drawn from the Protocol could be used to avoid a global environmental disaster through cooperation among all involved.

58. As for the future of UNEP, Canada welcomed the decision by the Governing Council to establish a high-level committee to make recommendations on reforms and policy so that UNEP could fully meet the expectations of the international community. More generally, Canada welcomed the Secretary-General's stated intention to strengthen United Nations institutions in the areas of environment and sustainable development and renewed its commitment to the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21.

59. **Mr. Reva** (Ukraine) said that the international community was still far from having implemented the decisions and recommendations adopted at Rio, because the global environment continued to deteriorate despite the impetus given to international cooperation in the field of environmental protection.

60. For Ukraine, which had suffered the Chernobyl disaster, Agenda 21 was not just an abstract idea. Since independence, it had made prevention of environmental hazards one of its priorities by enacting appropriate domestic legislation and by becoming party to a number of international conventions in that field.

61. However, Ukraine could not achieve the goals of sustainable development without the concerted effort of the international community to assist it in overcoming the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster. It hoped that the special donor conference on Chernobyl, which would be held in the near future under United Nations auspices, would generate further support for the implementation of projects elaborated by the inter-agency needs assessment mission sent to the affected areas.

62. While the nineteenth special session had raised the international community's awareness of the growing environmental problems that unfortunately continued to affect the world, it had also led to a series of new initiatives. The final document of the session, which was a compromise text, was nonetheless centred on concrete measures and, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report (A/52/280), the experience gained during the preparations and the work of the special session should be taken into account in organizing similar meetings for follow-up to the other world conferences.

63. His delegation did not favour the recommendation to entrust certain tasks and functions of the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development and the Committee on Natural Resources to the Commission on Sustainable Development, as recommended in the report of the Secretary-General on United Nations reform (A/51/950). Such an action would risk overloading the agenda of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which was already the lead agency for the implementation of Agenda 21.

64. **Ms. Leu Agosti** (Observer for Switzerland) said that, at its nineteenth special session, the General Assembly had completed an important analysis of the progress and remaining difficulties in the implementation of sustainable development and had made significant recommendations on that subject.

65. First, Agenda 21 remained the basic programme of action for realizing the three components – environmental, economic and social – of sustainable development. Second, it had become crucial to move from the stage of theoretical debate to concrete measures for implementation. The Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 clearly indicated the two basic objectives to be pursued in the future, namely, poverty eradication and changing patterns of consumption and production. Finally, all agents

of sustainable development at all levels must be mobilized by forming partnerships among Governments, international agencies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. Accordingly, Switzerland had decided to organize a forum on sustainable development in Geneva during the second quarter of 1998.

66. The role of UNEP must be strengthened, as it remained the main United Nations agency with responsibility for environmental issues. The Commission on Sustainable Development must also continue to play a central role as the policy body for the implementation of Agenda 21 by including in its debates representatives of the economic sectors and major groups. Switzerland was pleased to be an active participant in the discussions within the Commission towards establishing a strategy for sustainable use of freshwater resources, of which the programme on the sustainable development of mountain ecosystems was an important component.

67. Finally, Switzerland would continue to support intergovernmental cooperation on the sustainable management of forests by hosting one or more meetings of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests in Geneva. It hoped that the work of that forum would not duplicate work being carried out in other bodies.

68. **Mr. Gerus** (Belarus) said that the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly had provided an opportunity for an in-depth examination of the increasingly serious problems in the economic, social and environmental fields and the negative trends of deepening poverty and environmental degradation, which the inadequate measures taken at the national, regional and international levels had not succeeded in reversing, as the Commission on Sustainable Development had indicated at its fourth and fifth sessions. It had also allowed members of the international community to combine their efforts to elaborate new ways of building consensus, with the goal of achieving global sustainable development, and its work had resulted in the adoption of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21.

69. Determined to implement the various provisions of Agenda 21, the Republic of Belarus was prepared to broaden its cooperation with all its international partners. For several years, the Government had systematically taken into account the ecological dimension in drafting its economic and social development programmes, particularly because of the special circumstances resulting from the dramatic aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster. New laws on environmental protection and protected zones had been adopted, and Belarus had ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity. Furthermore, in 1996, Belarus had become the first among the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries to adopt a national sustainable development strategy.

70. He also noted that the International Conference on the Sustainable Development of Countries with Transition Economies had been held in Minsk from 16 to 18 April 1997. At that Conference, the most feasible means and mechanisms for solving the problems experienced by those countries had been defined. It was encouraging to note that the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly had taken into account the recommendations of that Conference in its final document.

71. The time had come to adopt specific measures to implement the decisions of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. At its fifty-second session, therefore, the General Assembly must define the tasks to be accomplished immediately, and the Second Committee must adopt its draft resolutions by consensus, giving special consideration to eradication of poverty, changing production and consumption patterns, problems relating to the sustainable use of forests and mitigation of natural disasters. His delegation was ready to participate actively in the implementation of the resolutions of the nineteenth special session.

72. **Mr. Aass** (Norway) said that, while the nineteenth special session had been marked by a lack of euphoria because of the mixed results achieved since Rio, the decisions taken after the session provided a basis for reinforcing efforts to promote sustainable development in the years to come.

73. The nineteenth session had entrusted a focused and issue-oriented multi-year programme of work to the Commission on Sustainable Development, and had identified a number of gaps in follow-up to UNCED, particularly with regard to freshwater resources and questions relating to energy, which would be referred to an intergovernmental group of experts on energy and sustainable development. The session had also provided a way forward for the international dialogue on forests by creating the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, which had already held its first session. In that regard it was important to ensure that the Forum's programme of work did not duplicate the process leading up to the nineteenth special session.

74. While it was necessary to increase efforts to enhance inter-agency cooperation and coherence, primary responsibility for sustainable development lay with Member States themselves; in that regard the recommendations of the nineteenth special session provided a useful framework for

concerted national efforts. Over the next five years his Government intended to work energetically to that end, and had recently established an interministerial committee on sustainable development, entrusted with the task of promoting the implementation of decisions taken at the nineteenth session. He hoped that all Governments would give higher priority to follow-up to Agenda 21.

75. **Mr. Palsson** (Iceland) said that his Government welcomed the statement of commitment adopted by the General Assembly at its nineteenth session, as well as government participation at that session at the highest level.

76. Iceland had developed a national strategy on sustainable development which required the active involvement of all sectors of society. His delegation supported the adjustments made in the methods of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, as well as the new programme of work for the Commission adopted at the special session, since it concentrated on a number of key issues that were of special relevance to sustainable development.

77. Two aspects of the programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21 were particularly noteworthy. With regard to chemicals, his Government had strongly advocated the adoption of a legally binding instrument for controlling the emission of persistent organic pollutants. The decision of the Governing Council of UNEP (18/32) to convene an international negotiation committee with a mandate to prepare such an instrument by the year 2000 was an important step in that direction. As for the health of the oceans, greater recognition must be given to the important functions that the oceans played in the biosphere, especially in the carbon cycle and the regulation of temperature, which provided the basis for life on earth in its present form. For those reasons Iceland welcomed the decision of the Commission on Sustainable Development to devote its 1999 session to the oceans and seas.

78. **Ms. Acosta** (Venezuela) said that Agenda 21 was the basic framework for decisions affecting the environment and development, just as the Santa Cruz de la Sierra Declaration, adopted at the Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development in 1996, was the plan of action for sustainable development in the Americas.

79. At the nineteenth special session, which had had the task of an overall appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, it had been recognized that, five years after the Rio Summit, progress had been scant, that environmental degradation and poverty subsisted, and that the gap between developing and developed countries had grown.

80. The industrialized countries had not taken the measures needed to slow environmental degradation caused by unviable production and consumption patterns and had neither mobilized the additional financial resources to assist developing countries or facilitated the transfer of ecotechnology to those countries. It was imperative for the World Environment Fund, now restructured, to have the necessary financial resources to facilitate the implementation of Agenda 21 as a whole.

81. Venezuela, for its part, had taken steps to implement the guidelines in chapter 11 of Agenda 21 by strengthening its forest and forest reserves management programmes and by developing a vast national programme of plantations with the participation of local communities, as well as programmes aimed at combating deforestation and at preserving and protecting zones of particular ecological interest.

82. Her delegation reaffirmed the principles set forth in General Assembly resolution 44/228, supported the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which it was important to strengthen, and deplored the lack of financial resources to fund Agenda 21. Her Government had adopted a programme on follow-up to the implementation of Agenda 21 containing specific recommendations in all areas of action to promote sustainable development, not overlooking any of its economic, social, or ecological components, and urging the international community to commit itself to Agenda 21 so that, at the next appraisal in 2002, clear progress would be apparent.

83. In view of the difficulty of implementing Agenda 21, her delegation thought it extremely important to promote the transfer of appropriate financial and eco-technological resources to the developing countries. She reaffirmed that the level of official development assistance was inadequate, that additional resources must be mobilized on favourable terms together with private investment flows, and that no barrier to international trade on ecological pretexts was acceptable, and invited the developed countries to further open their markets to products from developing countries.

84. **Mr. Dzundev** (The former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia) said that although primary responsibility for achieving sustainable development lay with Governments, such efforts must be complemented by international cooperation, especially at the regional and subregional levels. The economies in transition needed such cooperation to meet the challenge of the modernization of old technologies which were generators of pollution. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, with support from the World Bank, had adopted a national plan of action for the

protection of the environment. It also had adopted a new act on the protection and promotion of the environment and nature. Activities to be undertaken under the new act would require participation by the public and private sectors and should be supported by international, bilateral and multilateral agencies. The programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21 had set goals and objectives which must now be attained.

85. **Ms. Al-Joubouri** (Iraq) said that the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly had achieved only modest results. In paragraph 14 of the Secretary-General's report (A/52/280), the Assembly emphasized that all United Nations organizations and programmes should strengthen their support for national efforts to implement Agenda 21. However, Iraq could apply neither the Rio resolutions nor those adopted at the special session because, at the time of the 1991 military aggression, all kinds of weapons had been used on Iraqi territory, in particular, weapons containing depleted uranium, which had never before been used in international conflicts, with catastrophic consequences, both ecological (destruction of water-treatment plants, sewer and irrigation systems, etc.) and human (skin diseases, various kinds of cancer, miscarriages, birth defects, muscular and skeletal atrophy, etc.). The embargo imposed on Iraq had only worsened the situation, not only in that country but throughout the region, hence the appeal by the international community for the embargo to be lifted.

86. At its nineteenth special session the General Assembly had identified a number of factors which were impeding international cooperation on environmental protection, in particular, the fact that the developed countries had not honoured the commitments they had undertaken at the Rio Summit (such as the allocation of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance and the transfer of non-polluting technologies to the developing countries on preferential terms) and that they had failed to adopt effective measures to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, thereby causing unprecedented global warming. Owing to their unsustainable production methods and consumption patterns, the developed countries clearly bore the major responsibility for global pollution. Consequently, they must shoulder their responsibility by fulfilling the commitments they had undertaken at the Rio Summit, in other words, by providing the developing countries with financial and technical assistance to enable them to develop their industries and enhance environmental protection.

87. **Mr. Cho** (Republic of Korea) said, with respect to sustainable development, that unsustainable consumption patterns and poverty persisted and that the prospects for the transfer of financial resources and technology remained sombre. Moreover, parochial national interests prevailed over global objectives. However, it was encouraging to note that the General Assembly had at its nineteenth special session identified priority issues and agreed on the programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development for the coming five years. His delegation particularly welcomed the inclusion of comprehensive guidelines regulating the transboundary transfer and safe management of radioactive waste in the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. Those guidelines should be faithfully implemented at the global, regional and national levels and the Commission on Sustainable Development should regularly review their implementation. His delegation also welcomed the adoption of the Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management and hoped that it would enter into force at an early date.

88. Global partnership for sustainable development was a long-term process which required determination and commitment, and his delegation stood ready to play its part in strengthening that partnership.

89. **Mr. Don Nanjira** (World Meteorological Organization) said that although the implementation of Agenda 21 was first and foremost the responsibility of Governments, it also required the active involvement of all sectors of society, including the scientific and technological communities. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) was uniquely placed to follow-up on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and, to that end, had adopted a strategy based on a number of principles, namely, to enhance existing, and develop new, services and products at all levels in the light of Agenda 21; develop a coordinated system for climate prediction; systematically identify the needs of the national meteorological and hydrological services of WMO as they related to sustainable development and to national priorities, for inclusion in country development strategies; assist those services in building adequate capacity to locally apply data, information and products; provide the authoritative scientific voice within the United Nations system in matters relating to climate change, freshwater availability, atmospheric constituents and other matters relating to sustainable development; and increase public information and communication efforts.

90. The assessment by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session indicated that the global environment had continued to deteriorate and that much remained to be done to meet the commitments undertaken at Rio in 1992. However, notable progress had been made in several major areas. In order to make further progress, all

countries must make a stronger commitment to implement the various conventions whose purpose was to protect the global environment.

91. Greater support for the networks monitoring the atmosphere and oceans was imperative in order to improve scientific knowledge and advice to enable Governments and policy-makers to enhance their efforts to mitigate the impact of natural disasters. Strong support also was needed for the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, including the preparation of its third assessment report on climate change to be issued by the year 2000.

92. **Mr. Özugergin** (Turkey) said that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development had provided an opportunity to take a fresh approach to tackling global problems which had assumed alarming proportions. Instead of making Governments alone responsible for promoting the cause of sustainable development, a role had been projected for everyone: Governments, businesses, scholars, teachers, women, children and non-governmental organizations.

93. The General Assembly had agreed at its nineteenth special session that the concept of sustainable development should henceforth be a component of national planning and that the issues which had proved most difficult to resolve in 1992 were still problematic today.

94. Although the special session had not met all expectations, it nevertheless had been successful in strengthening the momentum generated by the concept of sustainable development and in maintaining the global focus on environmental issues.

95. For its part, his country looked forward to participating in shaping new thinking on issues such as freshwater resources, forests, transport of goods and waste disposal, as well as on broader developmental issues such as population, human settlements, finance, poverty eradication, changing of consumption and production patterns and international trade.

96. **Mr. Ri** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that although the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly had not fully met the expectations of the developing countries, it had provided the international community with a useful opportunity to renew its commitment to attain the objectives established at the Earth Summit.

97. It was clear that economic growth, social development and environmental protection were indispensable for sustainable development. However, certain unfair aspects in international economic relations eventually would impede sustainable development by marginalizing the developing countries, particularly the least developed among them, from international economic development and by widening the gap between the developed and the developing countries. Moreover, financial and technical assistance to the developing countries had continued to decline because the political commitments entered into at the Rio Summit had not been honoured.

98. The implementation of Agenda 21 required a sense of common responsibility on the part of the international community. It also required Governments to discharge their respective obligations bearing in mind that development levels and capacity varied from one country or region to another. Accordingly, it was essential for the international community to translate the Rio Declaration and Programme of Action into concrete measures and further enhance international cooperation and global partnership.

99. In that context, the developed countries should promptly fulfil the agreed target for official development assistance and should explore new resources to support the development process of developing countries. It was also necessary to put a mechanism in place to promote the transfer of environmentally sound technology to the developing countries on preferential terms.

100. In order to facilitate the implementation of Agenda 21 at the national level, all of the United Nations funds and programmes should, within their respective mandates, strengthen support for national efforts in a manner consistent with the plans, policies and priorities of countries.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.